



FIRST 5 SANTA CRUZ COUNTY



ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT



July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

October 2025

VisionFirst

Program Description

The American Optometric Association recommends that children should have their first comprehensive eye exam between the ages of 3 and 5, and their next eye examination should be when they start school, around 5 years of age.

“Every experience a preschooler has is an opportunity for growth and development. They use their vision to guide other learning experiences.

- *From ages 2 to 5, a child will be fine-tuning the visual abilities gained during infancy and developing new ones. ...*
- *They are developing the visually-guided eye-hand-body coordination, fine motor skills, and visual perceptual abilities necessary to learn to read and write.*
- *Steps taken at this age to help ensure vision is developing normally can provide a child with a good "head start" for school. ...*
- *The preschool years are a time for developing the visual abilities that a child will need in school and throughout his or her life.”²¹*

To help identify vision problems early in life, VisionFirst was developed in Santa Cruz County as a way to provide children as young as 6 months old with a simple instrument-based vision screening right in their child care setting. First 5 VisionFirst Outreach staff were trained to use the Spot Vision Screener, a handheld portable device designed to quickly and easily detect vision issues. The Spot Vision Screener detects potential vision problems, such as nearsightedness, farsightedness, blurred vision, unequal refractive power, eye misalignment, and unequal pupil size.

The Spot Vision Screener does not replace a complete eye examination by an optometrist. Rather, it only identifies a potential vision issue. Parents of children who are found to be “out of range” (showing a potential vision problem) are encouraged and assisted in following up with a full vision exam from an optometrist. At this appointment, the optometrist can determine if the child requires glasses, needs to be monitored, or requires regular eye exam follow-up care.

Following the completion of a successful pilot program in summer 2015, VisionFirst was integrated into First 5’s Santa Cruz Reading Corps program,²² which increased the reach of the program. In 2016-17, VisionFirst was expanded to include all state-funded preschool programs in the County. In addition, because the Spot



²¹ American Optometric Association, *Preschool Vision: 2 to 5 Years of Age*, [Retrieved 9/1/25 from <http://www.aoa.org/>], 2025.

²² The Santa Cruz Reading Corps program was discontinued in 2020-2021 as California State Preschool programs were not open to in-person instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Vision Screener can provide screenings to children as young as 6 months old, First 5 piloted screenings in 19 infant and toddler classrooms.

Since the start of the program, vision screenings have been completed in 51 state-funded preschool and infant/toddler classrooms, 10 Migrant Seasonal Head Start classrooms, 4 state migrant classrooms, 4 Early Head Start classrooms, 13 Head Start classrooms, and 17 private preschool and infant/toddler classrooms, providing screenings at a total of **99** different classrooms in Santa Cruz County.

For children who are shown to have a vision issue, First 5 VisionFirst Outreach staff help parents find local optometrists if they don't already have one, and also provide crucial information and resources to help parents encourage their children to wear their new glasses.

- The First 5 website includes an entire section about VisionFirst, and provides videos and read-aloud books about eyeglasses. Some answer key questions for children, such as, "How do you know if you need glasses?", and "How does an eye doctor check your eyes?". Other books help build children's confidence in wearing their glasses.
- All parents are given a flyer, "Tips to encourage your child to wear their glasses."

The VisionFirst program believes that the more activities and books about vision health and screenings teachers have in their classrooms, the more comfortable children will feel when getting their eyes checked and seeing others with glasses. To assist with this, First 5 developed a bilingual *VisionFirst Dramatic Play Kit* that is given to child care sites participating in the program.



A dramatic play set-up in a child care site

Due to the success of the VisionFirst program, some local partners (including Migrant & Seasonal Head Start, Early Head Start/Head Start sites, and Santa Cruz Community Health Centers) have purchased their own Spot Vision Screeners to provide on-going screening.

The following two images are examples of what the screening results look like using the Spot Vision Screener. The image on the left shows screening results that indicate that the child may have vision issues. The image on the right shows the screening results for the same child wearing glasses, which shows the vast improvement in his vision. This shows how the Spot Vision Screener camera can identify potential vision problems, and how easily these results can be shared with the child's parents for discussion.

Screening results indicating vision issues

Vision screening does not replace a complete eye examination by an ophthalmologist or optometrist.

Complete Eye Exam Recommended

Vision Screening Summary

SUBJECT ID: _____

SCREENING: _____ GENDER: **M**

AGE: _____

FIRST NAME: _____

LAST NAME: _____

POTENTIAL CONDITION

• Astigmatism (OD)
[cylinder housing]

• Gaze (OD)
[eye alignment]

• Gaze (OS)
[misalignment]

OD: +1.25, +2.50 @170°, +1.25 @6°

OS: +0.50, -1.25 @6°

RIGHT EYE: OUT OF RANGE, IN RANGE, OUT OF RANGE

LEFT EYE: OUT OF RANGE, IN RANGE, OUT OF RANGE

BOTH EYES: amblyopia, anisometropia, gaze asymmetry

VisionFirst
A program of FIRST5
If you have questions, please call (831) 465-2209

Screening results after receiving eyeglasses

Vision screening does not replace a complete eye examination by an ophthalmologist or optometrist.

Screening Complete

Vision Screening Summary

SUBJECT ID: _____

SCREENING: _____ GENDER: **M**

AGE: _____

FIRST NAME: _____

LAST NAME: _____ (Wearing Glasses)

POTENTIAL CONDITION

OD: +0.75, -1.50 @173°, +0.50 @18°

OS: +0.25, -0.50 @18°

RIGHT EYE: OUT OF RANGE, IN RANGE, OUT OF RANGE

LEFT EYE: OUT OF RANGE, IN RANGE, OUT OF RANGE

BOTH EYES: amblyopia, anisometropia, gaze asymmetry

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One VisionFirst Story

Should young children wear their eyeglasses to school? While parents often worry about them breaking and prefer to leave them at home, glasses are vital for effective learning. The truth is that school is where eyeglasses are most beneficial, where children need to clearly see the items in their classroom, the materials on the walls, their books and letters, and their teachers and classmates.

This year, we were excited to see that many children who had been screened in prior years and found to be "out of range" were wearing their eyeglasses when we visited their classrooms. Teachers' encouragement and support made the transition to wearing eyeglasses for many of these children a smooth process.

When we initially screened these children, parents only saw the results indicating that they were "out of range." This year, these parents were able to compare the results of their child's vision with and without eyeglasses. Although the difference was extreme for some children, as one mom put it, "If it hadn't been for this vision screening, I would have never known my child needed eyeglasses."

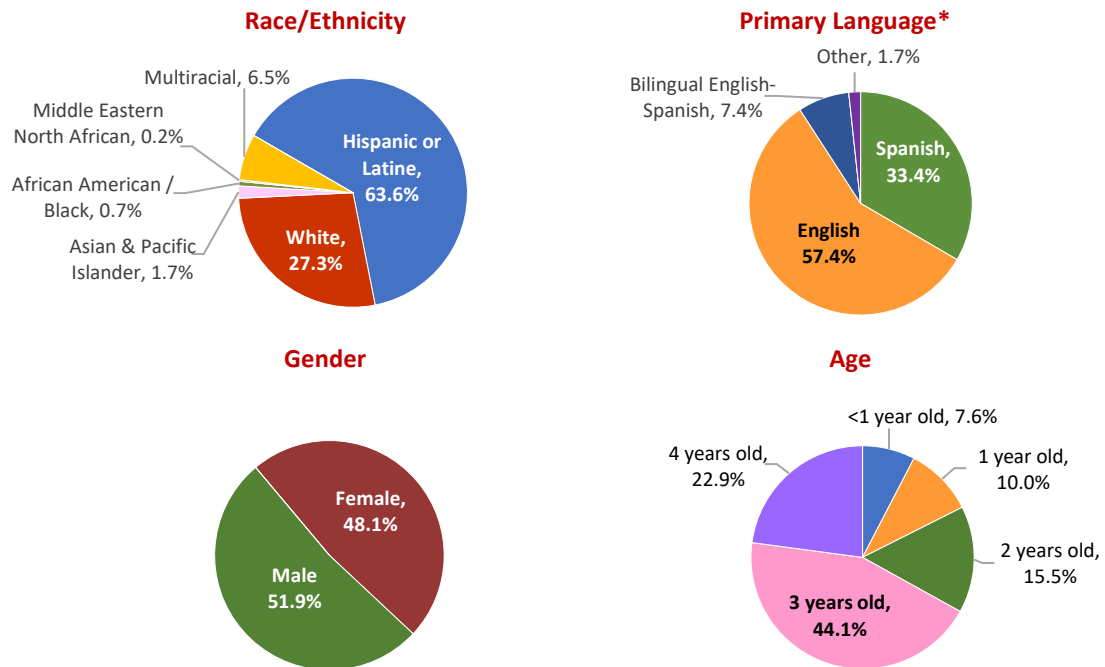
- First 5 VisionFirst program

Population Served

	2024-2025
Children	472

Source: First 5 Santa Cruz County, VisionFirst records, 2025.

Figure 24: Demographics of Children (ages 0-5) participating in VisionFirst (2024-25)



Source: First 5 CCD database for July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025.

Note: Clients with missing or unknown data for a demographic are excluded from that demographic's analysis.

* "Other" language options may include Multilingual, Bilingual-Other, and other languages.

N=(Race)=461; (Language)=470; (Gender)=472; (Age)=472.

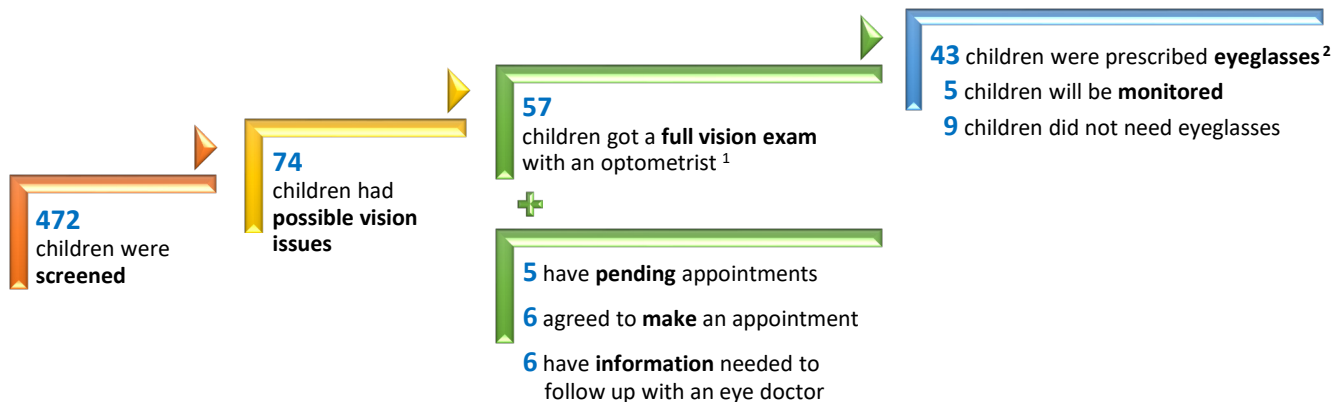
Outcomes

VisionFirst helped identify children who might have vision problems, many of whom then had full vision exams at an optometrist. First 5 VisionFirst Outreach staff reported these screening results:

- Of the **472** children screened, **74** had possible vision problems identified (16% of all children screened).
- 57** of these children have followed up with a full vision exam at an optometrist.²³
- Of those children who had a full vision exam, **43** were prescribed eyeglasses, **5** will continue to be monitored for possible vision issues, and **9** children did not need eyeglasses.

²³ These FY 2024-25 results are as of 9/3/25, in order to get as thorough a report as possible of the final outcomes for this cohort.

Figure 25: **VisionFirst outcomes – Santa Cruz County (2024-25)**



Source: First 5 Santa Cruz County, VisionFirst records, 2025.

Note: These FY 2024-25 results are as of 9/3/25, in order to get as thorough a report as possible of the final outcomes for this cohort.

¹ Full vision exams were conducted either for the first time, or with the child's current optometrist.

² The number of children prescribed eyeglasses includes children who received eyeglasses for the first time, and also children who already go to an optometrist and have glasses, but weren't wearing them during vision screening.

Local partner activities

The PVUSD Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) program and Head Start, Early Head Start, and State Preschool sites have adopted this program and purchased their own Spot Vision Screener devices. In 2024-25 these sites conducted their own screenings and follow-up, and reported these outcomes:

Figure 26: **Local partners' vision screenings using the Spot Vision Screener (2024-25)**

	NUMBER OF CHILDREN SCREENED	NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH POSSIBLE VISION ISSUES	NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO GOT A FULL VISION EXAM WITH AN OPTOMETRIST	RESULTS
PVUSD Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) program	511	Information not available	Information not available	• 56 were prescribed glasses
Head Start, Early Head Start, and State Preschool sites	157	60	14	• 7 were prescribed glasses • 3 will be monitored • 3 did not need glasses • 1 outcome was not reported

The impact of the VisionFirst program—and at agencies that adopted this program—may be even greater, as it's likely that these efforts may also lead to families getting vision exams for their other children as well. Future work by the VisionFirst program will focus on continuing to provide these services to existing VisionFirst sites, expanding these screenings to additional child care sites, and helping more families follow up with full vision exams.